

22 September-16 October 1860. The following mediums are referred to, chiefly from personal investigation: J. R. Newton (pp. 4, 16-24), a healing medium; Mrs Conant (pp. 4-5, 24), a trance medium; J. V. Mansfield (pp. 5-12), a billet-reader, of whom Robert Chambers says that "he has been exclusively occupied giving responses to sealed notes, charging a dollar for each. He has now read about 120,000" [in eight years, making over forty a day!]; Lizzie Doten (pp. 15-17), a trance medium; Mrs French (pp. 25-7), a medical clairvoyante; the well-known medium Charles Foster (pp. 28-46), whose versatile phenomena included raps, skin-writing, billet-reading, and various physical phenomena; one Colchester (pp. 46-8), another billet-reader, whom Chambers suspected, and whose phenomena led him to wonder about Foster; Mrs Staats (pp. 49-52), a spirit-seer; Henry C. Gordon (pp. 56-62, 64-7), who used a kind of planchette and produced physical phenomena; a blind medium called Paist (pp. 62-4), who "can even drive a carriage—by the help of the spiritual sight or seership"; Laura Edmonds, the daughter of Judge Edmonds (pp. 68-74), with whom he had a conversation only; and finally Katherine Fox and Mrs Underhill (pp. 74-8), two of the Fox sisters, who showed him various physical phenomena. In this diary Robert Chambers also describes an apparition seen by Dr Joseph G. Gogswell (pp. 52-6).

These documents clearly contain material of much historical interest to psychical research, and students of the subject are much indebted to Mrs Fitzgerald for having so generously presented them to the Society.

TH. B.

#### A SITTING WITH D. D. HOME IN 1860.

[The most interesting of the papers by Robert Chambers, presented to the Society by his grand-daughter Mrs Edward Fitzgerald, is undoubtedly his detailed account of a sitting with D. D. Home, which is reproduced in full below. The sitting was held in Mrs Milner Gibson's house, and it will be seen that the report dates from the day after the sitting. This particular sitting does not appear to have been previously reported, unless it can be identified, as seems not improbable, with the sitting described by Robert Bell in his *Cornhill* article of August 1860 and afterwards by Dr Gully. (It is characteristic of the records of this period that it should be impossible to determine with certainty, from a comparison of two independent records, whether or not they relate to the same sitting.) For sittings in the same place at about the same time, see, for instance, D. D. Home, *Incidents in my Life*<sup>2</sup> (1864), pp. 141 ff., and Mme Home, *D. D. Home, his Life and Mission* (1888), pp. 137 ff., and

*The Gift of D. D. Home* (1890), pp. 143 ff. The Society's D. D. Home Collection contains a number of letters to Home from both Mrs Milner Gibson and Robert Chambers. These show that the former was on terms of the closest friendship with Home; and that the latter, though never so close an intimate, was in friendly correspondence with him. Not long before the sitting, for instance, on 7 March 1860, Chambers wrote to Home to ask him, on behalf of a Miss Douglas, to wear a pair of gloves for a short time and then to return them.

This account is printed for its historical interest, and no attempt is made critically to evaluate it. ED.]

On the evening of the 21st May 1860, at Mrs Milner Gibson's house, No. 3 Hyde Park Terrace,<sup>1</sup> a small party met to witness some of the phenomena alleged to be produced under an influence which attends Mr D. D. Hume. The party sat down at a round table in the back drawing-room, which was well heated and lighted. At Mr Hume's left hand was Mrs Milner Gibson; next her, Lady Shelley; then, in succession, Mrs R. Chambers, Dr Gully, Mr Robert Bell, Mr R. Chambers, Mademoiselle Gallere,<sup>2</sup> and Mr Ashurst; being nine persons in all. All having placed their hands on the table, knockings were soon heard at different parts of the surface, some in a different tone and force from others. The table also tilted in various directions; slid laterally several times; and finally rose about a foot into the air, but quickly came down again. In the course of the evening, it rose in the same way five or six times; on one occasion, fully eighteen inches. Mr Hume told us that if we could have sat quite still when the table rose, it would have continued longer off the ground. We almost unavoidably shifted back a little to allow it freedom of motion and clear ourselves of it; and this, he said, interfered with or marred the influence at work. It may be remarked that, while one person could doubtless have tilted up the table a little on one side with hand or foot, there was no visible means of raising it equably on all sides to such a height, unless most of the company had combined to raise it, the fact being that all sat perfectly still, with their hands laid lightly on the surface, where no such agency of course could be exercised.

Amongst the earliest particulars observed was a trembling of the table, which gradually extended to the floor and consequently to the chairs on which we were seated. All declared themselves sensible of this tremulation of the floor and chairs. There was also

<sup>1</sup> [*Sic*, read Hyde Park Place.]

<sup>2</sup> [This name is spelt "Galeer" in Mme Home's *The Gift of D. D. Home* (1890), p. 143.]

at this early stage a general experience of the gentle blowing of a cool *aura* ; the more remarkable as the room was very warm.

After perhaps half an hour spent in listening to rappings, &c. Mrs Milner Gibson asked in an endearing tone if "Nolly" was present, meaning the spirit of a son of hers not long ago deceased at eight years old. Taking a twice-round black-bead bracelet from her arm, and holding it half under the cover of the table, she asked if Nolly would take it from her ; and presently it was taken away from her, and carried about under the table, rattling, slapping on the fluted pillar, and dancing about, as if some playful child were amusing himself with it. Finally, it was laid on a sofa behind the company, on the side farthest away from Mrs Milner Gibson.

Acting under directions from Mr Hume, Mrs Chambers held a hand-bell half under the hanging table-cover, and it was in like manner taken out of her hand, and carried round under the table ringing ; all hands keeping meanwhile on the surface, as before. The spirit was asked to bring the bell to Mr Chambers, who presently putting his right hand under the table received it, as from an intelligent messenger, and brought it up to the surface. He then held it under the table cover again, and asked that it might be taken from his hand ; and presently it was received and carried off. The spirit was asked to give back the bell to Mrs Chambers, and she soon felt it at her knees ; but she failed to receive it rightly into her hand, and it was heard to fall with a clash upon the floor.

The end of the room formed a bow, with three windows, all closed and curtained. The curtain of the central window being now opened, and the lights all put out, we had the table removed close to the recess, and all sat down again as before, excepting that the part towards the recess was empty, Mr Ashurst having for this reason to take a seat behind Lady Shelley. The faint light which came through the window from the sky was presently lessened by the slow descent under invisible agency of the blind ; after which we might be said to be sitting in the dark. It was now expected that spiritual hands would become visible between the table and recess ; but we were warned against expecting any such thing too intently, as such expectations were apt to mar the influence. We were at the same time desired to go on chatting, however gaily, as remarkable phenomena were most likely to take place under such circumstances. No one besides Mr Hume professed to *see* any spiritual hand during the evening ; but, while we continued seated at the window, the sense of touch repeatedly bore witness to the presence of what were understood to be spiritual hands. I was frequently touched by what seemed to be a hand, both pattingly on the front of the leg, and with the palm laid on the knee.

Mrs Chambers asked if the spirit of her child Margaret was

present, and received an answer in the affirmative, expressed in the usual manner by three raps on the table. She asked if the spirit would touch her, and presently she felt a couple of little hands fondling her knees, scratching on her *moiré* silk dress, and patting behind the hanging table cover. A communication was spelt out by the alphabet (conducted by Mr Hume), to the effect, "My dear mother, I am near you." On a suggestion by Mr Hume, Mrs Chambers enveloped her hand in her handkerchief, and held it under the table, with a request that the spirit would take it. She felt as if a dog's nose touched her hand, and presently the handkerchief was drawn away from her. Mr Hume declared he saw it thrown across the table behind Mr Chambers, and there it was immediately after found on the floor by Mr Ashurst. It was impossible for Mr Hume to have dropped it close behind one thus sitting on the opposite side of the table. Mr Chambers then took the same means for having the same experience, but found, instead of a child's hand, a man's, which, after a vain effort on his part to grasp it, withdrew. A communication by the alphabet explained that this was his father's spirit. On a second time putting forward his hand within the handkerchief, the seeming hand came forward, nibbled at it a little, till it seemed to get a sufficient hold of the handkerchief, then drew off the handkerchief, which was next instant thrown in Mrs Chambers's face. In the course of these experiments, Mrs Chambers felt a hand placed upon her head thrice at intervals.

Now and then in the course of the evening, the accordion was held by Mr Hume with one hand under the table, and tunes were played upon it by invisible agency. While light lasted, we could see his one hand lying on the table, as the other held the instrument by the valve end, with the keys hanging downwards. It was then clearly impossible that he could be the player. Mr Chambers held it for a short time, during which a few bars of tunes were played. At a subsequent stage, while the instrument lay on the floor in the recess of the window, it was played on without any one holding it, giving forth the most beautiful strains imaginable, such as I could hardly suppose producible by any mortal musician. On my asking if the spirit of my father would play some of his favourite airs, the high notes were called into play, as in imitation of a quick tune on the flute, which was his instrument. The accordion several times was pushed up in the recess till it came and lay upon the table. Afterwards, it seemed to be carried entirely away from amongst us, and on our asking where it was, it was heard to give out a few notes from a point high in the air at a distant part of the room, as in answer to our enquiry. I may remark that amongst the strains which issued from it in its independent evolutions, there were some of the finest attenuation, as we thought—so fine, as to recall to me

the Shakespearian expression "nought lives 'twixt it and silence"; yet after an interval these were followed by an echo finer still, yet distinctly audible. On one occasion, there was a second echo—an echo of an echo, as it were.

We had now sat for about three hours. Latterly, the curtains of the one open window were drawn by invisible agency close together, so as to produce perfect darkness; but now these were in the same mysterious manner opened, so as to allow of our seeing the dim blind. Mr Hume rose and told us that a hand had taken his and was leading him into the middle of the room. Presently we heard him speaking there. "Oh," said he, "they are raising me up off the ground." Amidst breathless wonder, we heard him during the next two or three minutes speaking from midway up to the ceiling, and so apparently getting carried about through the room, till he seemed to be brought over us, and placed on the table, where I felt his feet and legs. The missing accordion came into his grasp as he sailed about, and played beautifully; afterwards, it was disengaged from him, and went about of itself, playing music that seemed to me quite heavenly. After he had rested a minute on the table, he was raised again, but not high, and we saw him crossing in front of the dim light. I then felt his feet resting on my shoulders, with about a third or fourth of his natural weight, so as not to be in the least inconvenient to me; and next minute or so he alighted gently on the sofa behind me. It was of course to be regretted that we could not see his figure fairly suspended in the air; but beyond question no one could have come upon the table by ordinary means without disturbing some one of our close circle, and so being detected in imposture. We were not left the least room to doubt that he was carried through the air and let down upon the table.

The only remaining manifestation was one very interesting to Mrs Chambers. A communication from her child spirit came as an enquiry, "May Margaret break the-roses?" referring, it was understood[,] to a rose-bush with two blown roses upon it, which stood on a stand at one of the side windows. Mrs Milner Gibson gave a cordial assent, and immediately some of the company heard a rose broken off, and this was next instant placed on Mrs Chambers's shoulder. The same spirit asked leave to make a hole in her mother's lace cuff, and on leave being granted Mrs Chambers felt a couple of little hands working at her lace, in which a small gap was made at the edge.

It was now midnight, and most of the company were beginning to feel weary. It seemed to be quite a proper time that the spirits proposed to give us a good night on the accordion. With a beautiful lullaby-like air, the proceedings closed.

London, May 22, 1860.